

- 21 -

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A panel having front and rear edges and first and second side edges and adapted to interfit and interlock with similar panels when  
5 installed, comprising:
  - a nailing flange along the rear edge of the panel;
  - at least one decorative element between the nailing flange and the front edge of the panel;
  - a longitudinal protrusion extending upwardly and forwardly  
10 between the nailing flange and the at least one decorative element;
  - an indented region on the underside of the panel along its front edge;
  - a longitudinal cavity in the indented region adapted to interfit and interlock with the longitudinal protrusion of an identical panel in front of  
15 it,
  - wherein, when the longitudinal cavity is interfitted and interlocked with the longitudinal protrusion of an identical second panel in front of it, the panel is latched from moving further backwards away from the second panel and the front edge of the panel is also latched  
20 against upward movement, and
  - wherein, when the longitudinal cavity is interfitted and interlocked with the longitudinal protrusion of the second panel, the indented region of the panel, when viewed from the side of the panel, encompasses both the longitudinal protrusion and the nailing flange of the  
25 second panel.
2. The panel of claim 1, wherein the panel further comprises at least one transverse structural support running between the front and rear edges of the panel between the first and second side edges of the panel.

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- 22 -

3. The panel of claim 2, wherein the at least one transverse structural support is a plurality of transverse structural supports running between the front and rear edges of the panel between the first and second side edges of the panel.
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4. The panel of either of claims 2 or 3, wherein the at least one transverse structural support is recessed from the bottom of the panel relative to the first and second side edges of the panel.
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5. The panel of any of claims 1 to 4, wherein the panel further comprises at least one longitudinal structural support running between the first and second side edges of the panel between the front and rear edges of the panel.
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6. The panel of claim 5, wherein the at least one longitudinal structural support is a plurality of longitudinal structural supports running between the first and second side edges of the panel between the front and rear edges of the panel.
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7. The panel of either of claims 5 or 6, wherein the at least one longitudinal structural support is recessed from the bottom of the panel relative to the first and second side edges of the panel.
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8. The panel of any of claims 1 to 7, wherein the longitudinal cavity extends substantially continuously from the first side edge to the second side edge of the panel.
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9. The panel of any of claims 1 to 8, wherein the longitudinal protrusion extends substantially continuously from the first side edge to the second side edge of the panel.

- 23 -

10. The panel of any of claims 1 to 9, wherein the nailing flange extends substantially continuously from the first side edge to the second side edge of the panel.
- 5 11. The panel of any of claims 1 to 10, wherein the nailing flange further comprises a water stop along its rear edge.
12. The panel of any of claims 1 to 11, wherein the panel further comprises an additional cavity on the underside of the panel between the  
10 front edge of the panel and the longitudinal cavity of the panel.
13. The panel of any of claims 1 to 12, wherein the panel further comprises:
- 15 a transverse protrusion extending upwardly along the first side edge of the panel; and
- a transverse cavity on the underside of the panel along the second side edge of the panel adapted to interfit and interlock with the transverse protrusion of an identical panel to the side of it,
- 20 wherein, when the transverse protrusion is interfitted and interlocked with the transverse cavity of a panel to the side of it, the panel is prevented from sideways movement away from the panel to its side.
14. The panel of any of claims 1 to 13, wherein the panel further comprises:
- 25 a recessed water reservoir extending downwardly from the top of the panel near the intersection of the first side edge and the rear edge of the panel; and
- a reservoir protrusion extending downwardly from the underside of the panel near the intersection of the second side edge and the front  
30 edge of the panel, adapted to interfit and interlock with the recessed water reservoir of an identical panel to the side of it,

- 24 -

wherein, when the reservoir protrusion is interfitted and interlocked with the recessed water reservoir of a panel to the side of it, the panel is further prevented from sideways movement away from the panel to its side.

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15. The panel of claim 14, wherein the recessed water reservoir drains into an adjacent drain gap.

10 16. A panel having front and rear edges and first and second side edges and adapted to interfit and interlock with similar panels when installed, comprising:

at least one decorative element along the front edge of the panel;  
a plurality of transverse structural supports running between the front and rear edges of the panel between the first and second side edges  
15 of the panel; and

a plurality of longitudinal structural supports running between the first and second side edges of the panel between the front and rear edges of the panel,

20 wherein the transverse structural supports and longitudinal structural supports are recessed from the bottom of the panel relative to the first and second side edges of the panel.

25 17. The panel of any of claims 1 to 16, wherein the bottom surface of the panel near the front and rear edges of the panel further comprises a plurality of slots between a hollow center of the panel and the front and rear edges of the panel.

30 18. The panel of any of claims 1 to 17, wherein the at least one decorative element is a simulated wood shake.

- 25 -

19. The panel of any of claims 1 to 17, wherein the at least one decorative element is a simulated tile.
20. The panel of any of claims 1 to 17, wherein the at least one decorative element is simulated slate.
21. The panel of any of claims 1 to 17, wherein the at least one decorative element is a simulated stone.
22. The panel of any of claims 1 to 17, wherein the at least one decorative element is a simulated brick.
23. The panel of any of claims 1 to 22, wherein the at least one decorative element is a plurality of decorative elements.
24. The panel of claim 23, wherein the plurality of decorative elements are arranged in a single row.
25. The panel of claim 23, wherein the plurality of decorative elements are arranged in a plurality of rows.
26. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from plastic.
27. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from rubber.
28. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from a blend of rubber and plastic.

- 26 -

29. The panel of either of claims 26 or 28, wherein the plastic takes the form of recycled industrial polymers.

5 30. The panel of either of claims 27 or 28, wherein the rubber takes the form of recycled rubber tire crumb.

31. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from fibreglass.

10 32. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from metal.

33. The panel of any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the panel is made from natural materials.

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34. The panel of any of claims 1 to 32, wherein the panel is colored to simulate a natural material.

20 35. The panel of any of claims 1 to 34, wherein the panel is about 40 inches in length.

36. The panel of any of claims 1 to 35, wherein the panel is about 16 inches in width.

25 37. The panel of any of claims 1 to 36, wherein the panel is about 1.8 inches in thickness at its thickest portion.

30 38. The panel of any of claims 1 to 37, wherein the panel has an exposed surface when installed of about three square feet.

- 27 -

39. An accessory cap having front and rear edges and first and second side edges, for covering changes of direction in a substrate, comprising:

a nailing flange along the rear edge of the accessory cap;

5 a decorative element between the nailing flange and the front of the accessory cap;

a protrusion extending upwardly and forwardly between the nailing flange and the decorative element;

an indented region on the underside of the accessory cap along its front edge;

10 a cavity in the indented region adapted to interfit and interlock with the protrusion of an identical accessory cap in front of it,

wherein, when the cavity is interfitted and interlocked with the protrusion of an identical second accessory cap in front of it, the accessory cap is latched from moving further backwards away from the second accessory cap and the front edge of the accessory cap is also latched against upward movement, and

15 wherein, when the cavity is interfitted and interlocked with the protrusion of the second accessory cap, the indented region of the accessory cap, when viewed from the side of the accessory cap, encompasses both the protrusion and the nailing flange of the second accessory cap.

20 40. The accessory cap of claim 39, wherein the protrusion is removable from and re-attachable to the accessory cap.

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41. The accessory cap of either of claims 39 or 40, wherein the accessory cap further comprises at least one transverse structural support running between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap.

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- 28 -

42. The accessory cap of claim 41, wherein the at least one transverse structural support is a plurality of transverse structural supports running between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap.

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43. The accessory cap of either of claims 41 or 42, wherein the at least one transverse structural support is recessed from the bottom of the accessory cap relative to the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

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44. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 43, wherein the accessory cap further comprises at least one longitudinal structural support running between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

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45. The accessory cap of claim 44, wherein the at least one longitudinal structural support is a plurality of longitudinal structural supports running between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

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46. The accessory cap of either of claims 44 or 45, wherein the at least one longitudinal structural support is recessed from the bottom of the accessory cap relative to the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

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47. An accessory cap having front and rear edges and first and second side edges, for covering changes of direction in a substrate, comprising a plurality of transverse structural supports running between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap, wherein the transverse structural supports

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- 29 -

are recessed from the bottom of the accessory cap relative to the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

48. An accessory cap having front and rear edges and first and second  
5 side edges, for covering changes of direction in a substrate, comprising:

a plurality of transverse structural supports running between the first and second side edges of the accessory cap between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap;

- 10 a plurality of longitudinal structural supports running between the front and rear edges of the accessory cap between the firsts and second side edges of the accessory cap,

wherein the transverse structural supports and longitudinal structural supports are recessed from the bottom of the accessory cap relative to the first and second side edges of the accessory cap.

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49. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from plastic.

50. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from rubber.  
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51. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from a blend of rubber and plastic.

- 25 52. The accessory cap of either of claims 49 or 51, wherein the plastic takes the form of recycled industrial polymers.

53. The accessory cap of either of claims 50 or 51, wherein the rubber takes the form of recycled rubber tire crumb.  
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- 30 -

54. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from fibreglass.
55. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from metal.
56. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 48, wherein the accessory cap is made from natural materials.
57. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 55, wherein the accessory cap is colored to simulate a natural material.
58. The accessory cap of any of claims 39 to 57, wherein the accessory cap further comprises a hinge along its longitudinal center to allow the accessory cap to flex and adjust to a variety of angles through which the substrate may change direction.
59. The accessory cap of claim 58, wherein the accessory cap is formed in one piece and wherein the hinge consists of a portion of the accessory cap along its longitudinal center formed of lesser thickness than the surrounding portions of the accessory cap.
60. A starter strip comprising:  
a nailing flange along the rear edge of the starter strip; and  
a longitudinal protrusion extending upwardly and forwardly in front of the nailing flange, adapted to interfit and interlock with the longitudinal cavity of the panel of any of claims 1 to 12,  
wherein, when the longitudinal protrusion of the starter strip is interfitted and interlocked with the longitudinal cavity of the panel, the panel is latched from moving further backwards away from the starter

- 31 -

strip and the front edge of the panel is also latched against upward movement, and

wherein, when the longitudinal protrusion of the starter strip is interfitted and interlocked with the longitudinal cavity of the panel, the  
5 indented region of the panel, when viewed from the side of the panel, encompasses both the longitudinal protrusion and the nailing flange of the starter strip.

61. The starter strip of claim 60, wherein the nailing flange of the  
10 starter strip further comprises a water stop along its rear edge.

62. The starter strip of either of claims 60 or 61, further comprising an integrated drip edge element along the front edge of the starter strip.

15 63. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter strip is made from plastic.

64. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter strip is made from rubber.  
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65. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter strip is made from a blend of rubber and plastic.

66. The starter strip of either of claims 63 or 65, wherein the plastic  
25 takes the form of recycled industrial polymers.

67. The starter strip of either of claims 64 or 65, wherein the rubber takes the form of recycled rubber tire crumb.

30 68. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter strip is made from fibreglass.

- 32 -

69. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter strip is made from metal.
70. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 62, wherein the starter  
5 strip is made from natural materials.
71. The starter strip of any of claims 60 to 69, wherein the starter strip is colored to simulate a natural material.
- 10 72. A system of panels comprising a plurality of panels as claimed in any of claims 1 to 38, interlocked together.
73. A system of panels comprising a plurality of panels as claimed in claim 13, wherein the panels are interlocked together in at least one row  
15 by interfitting and interlocking the transverse protrusion of each panel with the transverse cavity of any adjacent panel.
74. A system of panels comprising a plurality of panels as claimed in either of claims 14 or 15, wherein the panels are interlocked together in  
20 at least one row by interfitting and interlocking the reservoir protrusion of each panel with the recessed water reservoir of any adjacent panel.
75. A system of panels comprising a plurality of panels as claimed in any of claims 1 to 15, wherein rows of panels are interlocked together  
25 by interfitting and interlocking the longitudinal protrusion of each panel within a row with the longitudinal cavity of at least one panel within an adjacent row.
76. The system of claim 75, wherein the decorative elements of the  
30 panels within a row are staggered with respect to the decorative elements of the panels within an adjacent row.

- 33 -

77. A system comprising:

the starter strips of any of claims 60 to 71 installed along the edge of a substrate; and

5 the system of panels of either of claims 75 or 76 installed on the same substrate with the longitudinal cavities of the frontmost row of the system of panels interfitted and interlocked with the longitudinal protrusions of the installed starter strips.

78. The system of claim 77, further comprising a plurality of the  
10 accessory caps of any of claims 39 to 46 interlocked together to cover any change of direction of the substrate on which the system of panels is installed.

79. The system of claim 78, wherein the plurality of accessory caps  
15 are interlocked together by interfitting and interlocking the protrusion of each accessory cap with the cavity of any adjacent accessory cap.

80. A method of installing a system of panels on a substrate, comprising:  
20 installing one or more of the starter strips of any of 60 to 71 as required along an edge of the substrate by inserting fasteners through the nailing flange of the starter strips into the substrate;  
interfitting and interlocking the longitudinal cavity of each of a  
first row of the panels of claim 13 to the longitudinal protrusion of one  
25 or more of the starter strips such that each panel is latched from moving further backwards away from the starter strips and such that the front edge of each panel is latched against upward movement, and such that the indented region of each panel, when viewed from the side of the panel, encompasses both the longitudinal protrusion and the nailing  
30 flange of one or more of the starter strips;

- 34 -

interfitting and interlocking the transverse protrusion of each panel within the first row with the transverse cavity of any adjacent panel within the first row;

5 fastening the first row of panels to the substrate by inserting fasteners through the nailing flanges of panels within the first row;

interfitting and interlocking the longitudinal cavity of each of a second row of panels to the longitudinal protrusion of one or more panels within the first row such that each panel within the second row is latched from moving further backwards away from the first row and  
10 such that the front edge of each panel within the second row is latched against upward movement, and such that the indented region of each panel within the second row, when viewed from the side of the panel, encompasses both the longitudinal protrusion and the nailing flange of one or more panels within the first row;

15 interfitting and interlocking the transverse protrusion of each panel within the second row with the transverse cavity of any adjacent panel within the second row;

fastening the second row of panels to the substrate by inserting fasteners through the nailing flanges of the panels within the second  
20 row.

81. The method of claim 80, further comprising interfitting and interlocking additional rows of panels to the already installed system of  
25 panels.

82. The method of either of claims 80 or 81, further comprising the step of arranging each row of panels such that the decorative elements within the row of panels are staggered relative to the decorative elements within the previously installed adjacent row.  
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- 35 -

83. The method of any of claims 80 to 82, further comprising the step of removing existing cladding material from the substrate prior to installing the one or more starter strips.
- 5 84. The method of any of claims 80 to 83, further comprising the step of covering the substrate with an underlayment prior to installing the one or more starter strips.
- 10 85. The method of any of claims 80 to 84, further comprising the step of installing the accessory caps of any of claims 39 to 46, and interfitting and interlocking them together, to cover any changes of direction in the substrate.